Fundamental texts of the RAF

city guerrilla (1971)
city guerrilla and class war (1972)
on armed fight in western europe (1971)
the last letter of holger meins (1974)

Camille Akmut [trans.] 2023

Introduction

A poignant, heavy meditation on death. These were no 'theoretical' texts, written by a philosopher looking out of the window, to nature, from a comfortable study — their authors died within a few months or years of publication and otherwise lived at that point, (1972)[1], in the constant knowledge of near, impending death. Accepted, internalized, made easy because made meaningful.

What is 'the good life'?, as the ancient philosophers called it, is the crossover theme of these texts whose advanced Marxist and communist discussions may cover those deeper metaphysical interrogations and tremors.

Holger Meins referred to these interrogations as the "*subjective side*" of Marxist Dialectics.

One of the questions raised is : how to fight exploiters and monsters, without becoming a monster oneself? "To fight pigs", they put it, but as a human being, while remaining so.

The sister texts *City Guerrilla* - short and best known - and *City Guerrilla and Class War* (longer, more elaborated) are presented. *On armed fighting in West Europe* is a connected dense review of history and theory, but also has a practical side : in the conclusion, it explains in detail how to build groups.

City guerrilla is "the revolutionary method of action of overall weak revolutionary forces".

In *City Guerrilla*, the first of these writings, the concept was introduced on the basis of the Iran - West Germany relations (whose latest illustration, in the 1970s, was provided by the State visit of the German President to the Shah). Against a portion of the left, they argue that critique of Capital's doing in the third world cannot be secondary, capitalists acted multinationally as they explained. "National and international class war combined" was thus another definition provided.

It starts with a quote of Mao : a life exchanged to serve the people weighs heavy - as a mountain. Its first part ends with another quote, by the Tupamaros: a small armed group is how one begins to build a popular army.

Finally, *The last letter of Holger Meins* is included due to sheer intensity combined with thematic similarities (the prerogative of praxis, meaningful death..)

When edited, ordered in the present way, these texts display an amazing consistency : Mao's quote - again, about deaths weightier than mountains - takes on a new meaning with Meins' final letter, written at death's gate.

The unbearable, uncompromising answer of Meins is that "*survival at every cost*" cannot be the answer, and must be rejected : one must fight to the death up to one's last strength. Meins lived according to that iron hard principle. Weighing 40kg at the time of his death, yet heavier than Mountain Tai...

Life and death of the RAF members weighed more than all mountains of China...

[1] Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, Ulrike Meinhof, Holger Meins, Jan-Carl Raspe were imprisoned in 1972, dying in prison : Meins 1974; Meinhof 1976 [after 4 years of isolation found hung]; Baader [from a shot in the back of the head], Ensslin [hung], Raspe [shot] 1977.

City Guerrilla and Class War (1972)

[Mao :] *Death is guaranteed for everyone, but not every death has the same weight/meaning. In ancient times in China, an author named Sima Tjian said: 'Death however is the fate of everyone, but the death of some is weightier than Mountain Tai, while the death of others has weight as little as swan feathering.' Dying for the interests of the People makes death heavier than the Mountain of Tai; to be on the side of fascists and die for the exploiters and crushers*[2] *of the People, means one's death is swan feather-weight...*[3][4]

20000 people die every year - because the shareholders of the automobile industry, merely in order to maximize their profits, have no care for road security and that of cars.

5000 people die every year - at their place of work or on the way there, or the road back home, because the owners of the means of production[5] care only about their profits, not about one death more, or less.

12000 people commit suicide every year, because they refuse to die in the interest of Capital, and thus would rather end it all on their own (terms).

1000 children are killed every year, because their homes, too small, serve only the purpose of enriching landlords, to bring them returns high as high as possible.

Deaths that serve the exploiters are what people call natural deaths. The refusal to die for exploiters is what they regard as "un-natural death". The acts of despair committed by people on the ground of the life circumstances created by Capital is what they, on the other hand, call crime. They say: to solve it, nothing can be done.

To make sure that these false views are never replaced by, never give way to[6] proper ones[7], the Federal inland ministry and ministries of states have the police working as death squads, execution commandos. Indeed without these false understandings of crime and death, Capital can not rule.

[RAF members] Petra, Georg and Thomas died fighting against death in the service of Capital/the exploiters. They were killed so that Capital could

[2] [Unterdrucker]

[3] Trans. note This quote, unspecified in the original, is from Mao's text "Serve the People" (1944)

[4] Trans. note (As with Japanese) there are problems and considerable divergence in the Westernization of Chinese names. Found also as Szuma Chien [Mao Selected Works III], Ssu-ma Ch'ien [Historians of China and Japan], Sima Qian... Meant is the great ancient historian.

[5] [Produktionsmittelbesitzern]

[6] [abgelost]

[7] Trans. note The notion of false consciousness, in addition to being of course the core of Marx/Engels' *The German Ideology*, is the subject – more immediate – of a separate article by Ulrike Meinhof (of that title).

continue its death work undisturbed. And so that people will continue thinking nothing can be done. But the fight has just started.

1. Persia and the contradictions of the New Left

Brandt[8] traveled to Teheran to reassure the Shah and straighten out any remaining doubts or frustrations left over by his his visit in the Summer of [19]'67 and the welcome given to them by West-German and Berlin students[9]. He assured the left was dead, whatever troublesome elements remained were currently being liquidated in Federal Germany, the confederation of Iranian students sufficiently isolated, and that Foreigner laws were currently being worked on such as to make legal their liquidation too.[10] Brandt had defined his foreign and national policy, and what it was : the foreign and national policy of the conglomerates, that, inside and outside, dominated markets and made politics. Brandt in Teheran : the foreign policy of Federal Germany had to follow its own interests and remain free of any ideological prejudices.

The interests of Federal Germany in Persia are the interests of the German colony in Teheran. These are,

> *Siemens, AEG-Telefunken, Bayer, BASF, Hoechst, Daimler-Benz, Deutsche Bank, Mannesmann, Hochtief, Klöckner-Humboldt-Deutz, Merck, Schering, Robert Bosch, die Bayerische Vereinsbank, Thyssen, Degussa u.a.*[11]

the same ones which, in the newspapers of Teheran, had ads inserted to celebrate the coming of the Kanzler, and the reason why the Shah commanded the press to celebrate Brandt as a Nobel Prize for Peace;

They are here because the Shah also doesn't have ideological prejudices : because of the cheap working force in Iran, because of the stable political conditions in Iran, additionally the availability of raw materials and the proximity to certain markets.

Under "ideological prejudices" the Kanzler and Shah summarize the interests of German and Persian people. Three days before the arrival of Brandt in Teheran, 4 comrades[12] were killed, in Augsburg Thomas Weisbecker. A week after Brandt left, nine death penalties were executed against comrades. Federal attorney Martin praised the police public servants[13], who behaved excellently during raids in Augsburg and Hamburg.

[8] Trans. note Willy Brandt, President [Kanzler] of West Germany 1969-74. Political party : SPD (relevant for the, later exposition).

[9] Trans. note Meant are the demonstrations against the Shah in Germany.

[10] ["die Reste von Verstimmung"]

[11] Trans. note In this list, Thyssen in particular is a company drenched in infamy for anyone familiar with Nazi history (as a manufacturer of metals ergo arms) - to see them re-appear in Iran should surprise no one. Among others, Siemens played a major role too, and the same could be said. The RAF indirectly references this continuity with the phrase "Obwohl das deutsche Kapital faschistisch vorbelastet ist".

[12] ["Genossen"]

[13] ["Polizeibeamten"]

German Capital in Persia is taxed at a lower rate than other capital in Persia; German development funds help finance German projects in Persia; thanks to German military money the imperial[14] arsenal in Persia was modernized; 22 Millions DM[15] for the Persian defense industry[16] in 1969 carried 250 Million DM follow-up contracts with the German defense industry. [Armed with] G-3 and MG-3[17] the Shah's regime — in the fight against "criminality" in Persia — ensures that in the future as well, wages in Persia will remain low, the political conditions stable, that profit-making possibilities[18] remain favorable for German Capital in Iran, the pressure on labor high based on the threat one could always move on to another country with even lower wages, pressure high here at home imprinting on public opinion that anti-fascist protests against the Shah threaten German foreign policy, and the interests of Federal Germany.

After the kneestand of the Kanzler in Poland, now the kneestand before the murder Shah. Domination of the Polish, Russian, Czech, Hungarian People under German fascism is not current[19] anymore. But the domination of Persian People under German imperialism is. The Nurnberg laws are not current anymore[20]. Laws against Iranian students, against Greek, Turkish, and Spanish workers, coming from countries with fascist regimes, are. German companies profit from fascism in those countries, and with the benefits they gain (from fascism) there put workers here under pressure. Death sentences, that our imprisoned comrades are sparred here, are only avoided because they are executed ["vollstreckt"] in Persia, Turkey, Greece and Spain.

The West-German Left remained silent on Brandt's Persia visit. There, they let him babble on. They let Hoveyda[21] talk, according to whom the death penalties were only handed out to common criminals. Even though the Shah is sensitive. Even though what little that happened on the 2nd of June[22] was enough to disturb Federal Germany-Iran relations, even though the Shah's reputation is so miserable as it could be, even though the Enemies of the People fear nothing more than to be called such, denounced as such. Even though one can assume that Brandt probably wasn't entirely comfortable with the whole adoration act ["Heuchelei"]. Despite German Capital having a fascist pre-history, and that building connections between fascism in Iran and German capital in Iran is relatively easy; and that there is no one to deny or defend this without ending in the spotlight themselves.

With the knowledge that not they, the intellectual Left, can change domi-

[14] [kaiserliche]
[15] Trans. note abbreviation Deutsche Mark (currency)
[16] ["Rustung"]
[17] Trans. note standard German machine gun (MG).
[18] ["Verwertungsbedingungen"]
[19] ["aktuell"]
[20] racial laws of the 1930s under the Nazis
[21] Trans. note Amir Hoveyda, Prime Minister of Iran 1965-77. (Howeida in the original.)
[22] Trans. note "the 2nd of June", in this context, must mean that of 1967, and the demonstrations against the Shah (culminating in the death of student Benno Ohnesorg, killed in Berlin).

nant conditions[23] but the proletarian Masses, that only West-German proletarian Masses can disown the companies, which profit so greatly from the Shah's fascism, and from which the fascism of the Shah profits [vice versa], this Left has ceased criticizing the fascism of the Shah and the Rule of West-German Capital in the third world. With the knowledge that Third world problems won't be the ones to ignite the fight of West-German proletariat against the Rule of Capital, and that this can develop only based on inland problems, they themselves have ceased to make third world problems an object of politics here, at home.

Such is the dogmastism and the short-sightedness of a portion of the Left. The fact that the working class in West-Germany and Berlin only thinks and acts in national terms does not however change the fact that Capital thinks and handles multi-nationally, and is rather a manifestation of the fractures existing within the working class itself, and an expression of [its] weakness.[24]

(...)

A year ago, we said : City guerrilla is the combination of national and international class war.[25] City guerrilla is the opportunity to make emergent in the minds of people the circumstances of imperial power. City guerrilla is the means of action, intervention of weak forces on the whole.[26] A progress in the class war is only obtained when illegal work is connected to legal work, when political-organisational activity does not exclude the possibility of city guerrilla.

(...)

[From 30 questions to the Tupamaros:] "*In the current stage of history, no longer can it be denied that an armed group, however small it may be, has better prospects for transformation into a large popular army [People's army] than a group that limits itself to rhetorical work and the recital of revolutionary phrases.*"

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[23] ["die Verhaltnisse"]

[24] Trans. note The overthrow of the Shah of Iran in 1979 is called by Hobsbawm "the greatest by far of the revolutions of the 1970s" [Age of extremes]. It is not known to us how German capital fared after this, along with other foreign Capital, if they moved to another country in the region or continued and resumed their affairs unchanged with new allies, in the ruins of the revolution. (Hobsbawm proceeds to characterize the complications and contradictions of that revolution, consisting in replacing a CIA installed Shah by a theocracy : "*The traditional Left was indeed present and active in Iran, and its part in the overthrow of the Shah (...) was far from insignificant. Yet it was almost immediately eliminated by the new regime. The Iranian revolution was the first made and won under the banner of religious fundamentalism and which replaced the old regime by a populist theocracy whose professed programme was a return to the seventh century...*"; "*The energetic cultural modernization of the Shah also turned against him. His (and the Empress's) genuine support for an improvement in the position of women was unlikely to be popular in a Muslim country, as the Afghan communists also were to discover. And his equally genuine enthusiasm for education increased mass literacy (...) and produced a large body of revolutionary students and intellectuals.*")

[25] Trans. note *City Guerrilla* (1971)

[26] Trans. note See the similar if not identical definition provided in that earlier text.

City Guerrilla, on the concept of (1971)

IV. Primacy of action

Disconnected from action the reading[27] of Kapital is nothing but bourgeois studying.[28] Similarly, the programmatic announcements are just babble. Proletarian internationalism without action is just pretense[29]. To take the position[30] of the proletariat theoretically means to take it on practically.

The Red Army Fraction speaks [in this regard] of the Primacy of action[31].

(...)

V. City guerrilla

(...)

The concept of city guerrilla comes from Latin America : it is there what it can only be here : the revolutionary method of action of overall weak revolutionary forces.[32]

(...)

VI. Legality and illegality

The Anarchists' slogan "*Destroy what destroys you*"[33] aims at the direct mobilization of the Base, the youths in prisons and group homes, doing [lowly paid] apprenticeships, those who have it the worst, aims at spontaneous understanding, and is an invitation to direct resistance. The Black-Power phrase of Stokley Carmichael : "*Trust your own experience!*" had exactly that in mind. This phrase derives from the insight that, under capitalism, nothing, truly nothing, that oppresses, terrorizes, tortures does not have its origins in the capitalist mode of production; that every exploiter, whichever form they may take, defends their class interests, those of Capital, meaning : class enemy.

[27] ["Lekture"]

[28] Trans. note there is overall great consistency in the RAF texts (connecting Meinhof to Ensslin to Baader to Meins..), a reflection of their discipline : in a text by Meinhof, she denounces the degeneration of the university post 1960 : much like voting, access to universities had been extended to ever greater numbers (incl. prev. excluded groups) but only so because studying at that new university was useless (just like voting was) - ideas she developed under the umbrella of "false consciousness". Theories of knowledge based on "emotions" and "kind understanding" dominated now, which she denounced as "powerless".

[29] ["Angeberei"]

[30] ["Standpunkt"]

[31] [Primat der Praxis]

[32] Trans. note This doctrine has echoes in Mao, in articles like "On protracted war". c.f. "Some belittled the strategic role of guerrilla warfare (...) In a word, they lack the courage to admit that the enemy is strong while we are weak. They often deny this point and consequently deny one aspect of the truth." (Selected Works II)

[33] Trans. note found in underground rock songs of the time, for example, left over as archive. (e.g. Ton Steine Scherben)

In so far this anarchist phrase is correct, proletarian, and oriented towards class war. It is wrong because of the false consciousness it evokes, of just hitting back, punching them in the face. Organization is secondary, discipline is bourgeois ["burgerlich"], class analysis useless. The dialectic of legality and illegality must be considered lest one wishes to be exposed helpless to the oncoming repression, and to be imprisoned legally.

On the armed fight in West Europe (1971)

History teaches us that real political and military lines are not spontaneous and peaceful, but created through conflict and so develop. The fight for these lines must be conducted, on one hand, against the opportunistic Left, and Right-wing opportunism on the other.

(Mao Tse-Tung, Selected Works I)

1. Armed fighting - a central problem for revolutionary theory

An increasing amount of young people today awaken to a revolutionary consciousness. And, with it, growing willingness to work towards the proletarian revolution in disciplined, consequential fashion. The insight that, devoid of revolutionary theory, such a revolution cannot succeed advances, but few consequences have been drawn from this.

Revolutionary theory is not an academic viewpoint, it is not just an explanation of social structures, but first a manual for revolutionary action.

(...)

3. Proletarian consciousness, revolutionary theory and the role of revolutionary intellectuals

(...)

Anton Pannekoek, in all seriousness, held that "the shutting down of the press, interdiction of gatherings, arrest of leadership [etc.]" were the "extreme most measures" of the Bourgeois counter-revolution in the fight against the Proletarian revolution. Kautsky's and Rosa Luxemburg's lights did not go much further beyond the experience of socialist wisdom. The Russian mass strikes of 1905 have had the by-effect of letting wild fantasies about the power of striking grow within the minds of German socialists.

The Russian revolutionaries, Lenin first of all - in 1901 already (that is to say, 16 years before the victory of the proleterian Revolution and even before the founding of the Bolshevik Party) had explained the necessity of organizing armed resistance systematically and patiently. And to adapt it to the organisational principles of the Communist party. Lenin arrived at the conclusion that the Russian proletariat needed "a military organisation of agents". By which he meant the Party.

Lenin summarized his organisation views in the brochure *What is to be done?*

(...)

What are the next steps?

— Propaganda for armed fighting; to explain to the masses while it is necessary and unavoidable, and how to prepare for it (fliers and wall graffiti).

— Manuals on how to build weapons, strategy etc., distributed through same means.

— Building commando groups (3, 5 and 10-members), with comrades who know each other well both personally and in terms of their politics. Members should be certain they can handle the requirements and strains of armed fighting (in particular prison) and keep quiet under all conditions (even in bed!). The make up of commandos can not be discussed in groups or associations which have not proven, through Praxis, their willingness [to armed fighting]. It is a major error to let people contribute to that discussion who are not fully willing to take part in the fight themselves. It is also impossible for armed groups to emerge from "legal" institutions, organisations. These are through and through (including the leadership! ["Kader"]) full of pretenders, sophists etc.; to avoid joining the fight, they will always be able to come up with new theories as to why armed fighting is not justified. As soon as you'll have demonstrated the falsehood of their arguments, numbered 1 through 99, they'll come up with, invent number 100. (...)

The fighters should, as much as it is somehow possible, participate to public political life in companies, neighborhood and the universities. (...)

— Begin fighting, create connections to other groups without endangering the groups' security.

Have the courage to fight!
Have the courage to win!
For every thing reactionary in the world,
the following is true :

It won't fall, unless cut down.

The last letter of Holger Meins (1974)

The only thing that matters is this : Fight - now, today, tomorrow (...) What's of interest is what you do of it : a small step forward. Getting better. Learning from experience. That is what one must do. Everything else is rubbish[34]. (...) Every fight[35], action, confrontation delivers new unknown experiences, and such is how evolution happens when it comes to fighting. It only evolves this way. This is the subjective side of the Dialectics between revolution and counter-revolution (...)

Either one is a pig or a human being ["Schwein oder Mensch"]
Either one survives at every cost
or one fights to the death
Problem or solution
Nothing in between
Victory or death
(...)

To fight pigs, as a human being, for the liberation of human kind. Revolutionary, engaged in fighting - out of love for life, death denied. That is what it means to me : to serve the people.[36]

[34] ["Dreck"]
[35] Trans. note in English
[36] Trans. note. Meins died 9 days later, weighing 40kg, after a hunger strike in prison; hence the mention at the beginning of the text, one can only assume, of "fight now, today, tomorrow, hungry/starving or not" ["gefressen oder nicht"]

Original texts

- *Das Konzept Stadtguerilla*. 1971.
- *Uber den bewaffneten Kampf in Westeuropa*. 1971.
- *Stadtguerilla und Klassenkampf*. 1972.
- *Der letzte Brief von Holger Meins*. 1974.

References

- Mao. *Selected Works*. III. In particular "Serve the people" (1944), pp. 171 f. II. "On protracted war" (1938), pp. 113 f.

- *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 7 volumes (1968-1991).

Afterword

Against the marshmallow soft Left of today, ("the opportunistic left" under the pen of Mao), these texts are vibrant, brillant, uncompromised, untouched. They are what one arrives at, invariably, when all the layers of simulation have been peeled back. End station. Layer 0.

They're real, beyond any doubt. The authors meant exactly what they said. They lived according to principles, — let alone democratic revolutionary ones! — and who does? Except for, maybe, fifty laws of power and how to come up in the world... Against that, too, the rejection of "survival at every cost" was the bitter conclusion and lesson of the RAF.

Horst Herold, the director of the German FBI equivalent, in a declaration reported by Raspe during the Stammheim trial after Meinhof's death, said :

> '*Actions against the RAF must always be conducted in such a manner as to make impossible sympathetical positions.*'

From Chicago to West-Germany, the method of action is always the same, and it should be laughable were it not so tragic, effective : decrease sympathies for revolutionaries. Pit the people - whom they cherished and loved so much - against them. To kill them is not enough. Memories must be destroyed. Such that swines are now angels, and angels swines.

In *The Cambridge History of Iran* in seven volumes (regarded widely as the standard work on Iranian history in the West, of which the last volume is of relevance for the period), this inversion of history and memory and language is well illustrated in the case of Musaddiq [whose real crime had been to nationalize oil and expulse the foreign exploiters] :

> "*In late 1953, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, aided by the British Intelligence Service and Iranian conservative forces, engineered the overthrow of Musaddiq's government in favour of the Shah. Musaddiq was arrested, tried, and sentenced to solitary confinement for three years. The Shah returned from a brief exile to begin his rule but under the aegis of the United States. The Shah accused Musaddiq of having been under communist influence and of "treason". He charged him with pursuing a doctrine of "negative equilibrium", which stressed "the ending of Iran's suffering from the influence and domination of foreign powers" by granting "no concession to any foreign power and accepting no favour from any".*

He branded his own regime's policy "positive nationalism", promoting Iran's sovereignty, independence and development under his own absolute leadership, but in alliance with the West, and the United States in particular."

And, so "negative" becomes "positive" in this strange algebra.

The RAF regularly honored Mao by giving him the favor of opening their texts (*City Guerrilla and Class War*, *On armed fighting in West Europe*, ...). Mao in turn enjoyed ancient Chinese writers, and their bucolic proverbs.

Here is another one, from Selected Works II :

'A leaf before the eye shuts out Mount Tai.'